



Islamic Extremism on the Rise in Europe

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ABSTRACT

The involvement of British Muslims in the London bombings, along with the killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a radical Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent, have raised concerns that Jihadist Islam is penetrating Europe not only through new immigrants but also by appealing to European-born Muslims.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

French and American security analysts maintain that Europe has allowed itself to become a hotbed for radical Islam. The involvement of British Muslims in the London bombings, along with the killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a radical Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent, have raised concerns that Jihadist Islam is penetrating Europe not only through new immigrants but also by appealing to European-born Muslims. These young Muslims are willing to become suicide bombers and assassins in their place of birth, and not just in far-off conflict zones such as Iraq, Kashmir, or Afghanistan.

A study by Robert Leiken, director of National Security Studies at the Nixon Centre, found, that out of the 373 Jihadists that he studied, around a quarter were European Union citizens. Matthew Levitt, director of Terrorism Studies at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, in a testimony before Congress, said that “The rise of jihadist movements in Europe is alarming, not only because of the threat such movements pose to our European allies but because Europe has served as a launching pad for terrorists plotting attacks elsewhere.” There are currently around 15 million Muslims living in Europe, and they make around 3 percent of the European Union population. The Muslim community in Europe, which began arriving in the 1960s and 1970s, is growing at a rate of 7 percent a year in Austria, Spain, Sweden, Italy and Denmark.

The French were the first Europeans to endure Islamic terrorism, a legacy of their colonial past, and there are currently around 5 million Muslims living in France, making it Europe’s largest Muslim community. Following a number of Islamic terrorist attacks, the French passed legislation, which allows police to enter any mosque or Islamic prayer hall, deport imams that preach hate, such as Algerian cleric Abdelhamid Aissaoui. France has expelled ten radical imams since September 2002, according to police sources. France also does not grant asylum to Islamic extremists wanted in their home countries, many of whom found asylum in Britain, much to French chagrin.

Germany has the second largest Muslim community in Europe, but most of its Muslims are Turks who are more secular and western, and they are far more integrate into German society. Islamic radicalism in Germany focuses on Muslim activists who arrived in the country as refugees. The Hamburg cell involved in 9/11 comprised of Egyptian and Saudi students.

Islamic radicalism in the Netherlands is mainly North African in origin, and following the capture of Mohammed Bouyeri, Dutch police discovered the Hofstad Group, fifteen of whom are

facing terrorist charges: plotting to blow up a nuclear power station. Dutch security forces believe that there are hundreds of Jihadists in the country.

Spain has had a difficult time confronting Islamic terrorism, as for so long it fought ETA separatists. Spain's large Muslim community is Moroccan-based and allegedly acts as a trunk route for North Africans entering Europe. Many pass on to Italy, whose small Muslim community based around Milan has developed a reputation for its forging abilities, providing Jihadists with visas and funds before they head off to Iraq.

Britain's Muslim community is different from the European continent, as it is comprised of Muslims from the Indian sub-continent. Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims have largely integrated into British society, and have found little appeal in Islamic radicalism. The problem, according to security analysts, is the large Pakistani community in Britain, which is comprised of Muslims who have kept close contact with their homeland and keep traditional home life. There has been growing concern over the visits of British-born Pakistani youths to their parent's homeland, where they come under the spell of radical imams, as seen with at least two of the London bombers, Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain.

The common problem across Europe's Muslim community is the growing sense of "ghettoisation", alienation, poverty and radicalism, which is very pronounced in France. This has led David Masci, of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, to say that: "The successful integration of Muslims is crucial to the future of Europe." A view supported by recent polls, in which British Muslims for example have express concern over rising Islamophobia, which motivates some to think about leaving the United Kingdom.